



Celebrate

Sunday, November 19, 2023
25th Sunday after Pentecost

Our readings during November speak of the end times. Zephaniah proclaims that the coming day of the LORD will be filled with wrath and distress. Paul says it will come like a thief in the night and urges us to be awake and sober. Jesus tells the parable of the talents, calling us to use our gifts, while we still have time, for the greater and common good. In a world filled with violence and despair, we gather around signs of hope—word, water, bread, and wine—eager to welcome the good news of Christ’s coming among us.

Prayer of the Day

Righteous God, our merciful master, you own the earth and all its peoples, and you give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom, and prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Zephaniah (like the prophet Amos in last week’s first reading) presents the day of the LORD as one of judgment and wrath. Descriptions of the last day in the New Testament include details taken from Old Testament accounts of the day of the LORD.

Be silent before the Lord God!

For the day of the LORD is at hand;
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
he has consecrated his guests.

¹²At that time I will search Jerusalem
with lamps,
and I will punish the people
who rest complacently on their dregs,
those who say in their hearts,
“The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do harm.”

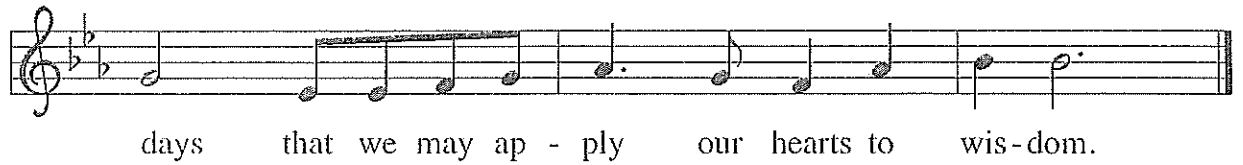
¹³Their wealth shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.

¹⁴The great day of the LORD is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter,
the warrior cries aloud there.

¹⁵That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
¹⁶a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.

¹⁷I will bring such distress upon people
that they shall walk like the blind;
because they have sinned against the
LORD,
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.

¹⁸Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the LORD’s wrath;
in the fire of his passion
the whole earth shall be consumed;
for a full, a terrible end
he will make of all the inhabitants
of the earth.



Lord, you have ¹ been our refuge

from one generation ¹ to another.

²Before the mountains were brought forth,

or the land and the ¹ earth were born,

from age to age ¹ you are God.

³You turn us back to the ¹ dust and say,

“Turn back, O child- ¹ ren of earth.”

⁴For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when ¹ it is past

and like a watch ¹ in the night; **R**

⁵you sweep them away ¹ like a dream,

they fade away suddenly ¹ like the grass:

⁶in the morning it is ¹ green and flourishes;

in the evening it is dried ¹ up and withered.

⁷For we are consumed ¹ by your anger;

we are afraid because ¹ of your wrath.

⁸Our iniquities you have ¹ set before you,

and our secret sins in the light ¹ of your countenance. **R**

[⁹When you are angry, all our ¹ days are gone;

we bring our years to an end ¹ like a sigh.

¹⁰The span of our life is seventy years, perhaps in strength ¹ even eighty;

yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow,

for they pass away quickly and ¹ we are gone.

¹¹Who regards the power ¹ of your wrath?

Who rightly fears your ¹ indignation?]

¹²So teach us to num- ¹ ber our days

that we may apply our ¹ hearts to wisdom. **R**

Though we do not know and cannot calculate the day of Christ's return, we live faithfully in the here and now as we anticipate the day when we will be given eternal salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us

not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep get drunk at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Gospel

Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus tells a parable about his second coming, indicating that it is not sufficient merely to maintain things as they are. Those who await his return should make good use of the gifts that God has provided them.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' ²¹His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made

two more talents.' ²³His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?' ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Let us turn our hearts to God, our breath and life, as we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Gracious God, you give talents and gifts to all your people, and you equip the church to serve. Turn us from fear and self-serving ways, that we use our talents to glorify you and encourage our neighbor. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You have been our dwelling place from one generation to another. Sustain the life of the planet; protect farmlands and harvests. Direct all people in wise stewardship of all the earth's resources. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You call us to honesty and integrity. Instill these values in the hearts of all nations and their leaders (*leaders may be named*). Free any who are oppressed, expose all corruption, and bring redemption to victims of injustice. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart. Where there is sickness or sorrow, bring healing, and where there is loneliness, reveal your love in community. We remember before you (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for the faith formation ministries of our church. Give to all children, youth, and adults who study your word the breastplate of faith and love. Shape us by your love and show us how to encourage one another. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Gracious God, you are faithful in all generations. For the promise of life and rest and for the witness of those who have died in faith (*especially*) we praise your goodness. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We offer our spoken prayers and those held in our hearts trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday Psalm 9:1-14. **Tuesday** Zechariah 2:1-5; 5:1-4. **Wednesday** Matthew 24:24-51. **Thursday** (Day of Thanksgiving [USA]) (commemoration of Clement, Bishop of Rome, died around 100; Miguel Agustín Pro, martyr, died 1927) Psalm 95:1-7a. **Friday** (commemoration of Justus Falckner, died 1723; Jehu Jones, died 1852; William Passavant, died 1894; pastors in North America) Revelation 22:1-9. **Saturday** (commemoration of Isaac Watts, hymnwriter, died 1748) Matthew 12:46-50. **Christ the King** Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 95:1-7a; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46.

CELEBRATE November 19, 2023 (Lectionary 33)

Volume 54, Number 4

CELEBRATE (ISSN 1083-3242, USPS 763-460) is published quarterly by Augsburg Fortress, 411 Washington Avenue North, Third Floor, Minneapolis, MN, 55401. Periodicals postage paid in St. Paul, MN and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Celebrate, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, P.O. Box 1553, Minneapolis, MN 55440-8730. Printed in U.S.A. Price per weekly part \$5.79 per 100 copies; price in Canada subject to exchange rates. Minimum order 50 copies of each issue; all orders must be in multiples of 50. Copyright © 2023 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced. Revised Common Lectionary © 1992 Consultation on Common Texts. Readings from New Revised Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Prayer of the day, psalm, and readings during the week from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* © 2006, admin. Augsburg Fortress. Refrain music by Anne Krentz Organ. Refrain accompaniment is in *Psalter for Worship, Year A* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007). Please visit our website at augsburgfortress.org. Lectionary year A.

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